

i'm not gonna teach him how to dance with you by reitvelds

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Summary:

you are the girl that i've been dreaming of ever since i was a little girl

Beverly Marsh is finally leaving Derry behind, and with it, the horror of her former life. But she finds herself alone in the small Indiana town of Hawkins, adrift without the other Losers, until she meets an extraordinary girl called Jane Hopper who is, in her own way, just as damaged.

1. prologue

Author's Note:

set post stranger things 2 (so the party's finished their last year of middle school and is about to go into high school) and post it (i changed the year to fit. don't worry about it, it really doesn't matter). the events of both st 2 and it are canon in this fic.

full playlist for this: <https://open.spotify.com/user/frankie.stein722/playlist/5WSQDQLuAyHIAft15ltGIL?si=JhkEdWEORxekGIL3xUPGWQ>

August, 1985

Derry, Maine

Beverly Marsh watched the town of Derry, Maine retreating through the dirty car window and felt an indescribable mix of relief and melancholy. She missed them already. She had only known them for a summer, and yet the bond she had with them felt more profound than she could comprehend, and she could not envisage happiness without them. Her boys, her lucky seven, her Losers.

Still, her escape at long last from Derry, from her father, felt triumphant. She'd lived in fear for so long, but now, she was free. *Free*. Never to hear *I worry about you, Bevvie, I worry a lot*, never again feel the air knocked out of her by a casual back-handed slap, never ever feel afraid in her own home again. It was all behind her now, receding in the rear-view mirror of her aunt's old Ford like the town itself, and as they crossed the city limits and rattled further and further along the highway, the memory of it seemed already to begin to fade.

They were travelling hundreds of miles west, to Indiana, where her aunt Meg had fled as soon as she was old enough, with a few

hundred dollars earned waiting tables and, like Bev, a burning need to escape Derry. But she settled for a little town just like it, though she sensed no underlying strain of maleficence as she did in her hometown, that miasma of violence and mayhem that seem to hang in the air like fog. Hawkins, Indiana was as average as small American towns come, quiet, sleepy, boring. Safe. Meg Marsh had fled her violent past nearly thirty years ago, and now she was bringing a niece she barely knew away from that same violence.

Meg glanced sideways at Beverly. She stared out of the window, unseeing eyes reflecting the green blur of trees racing past. Boxes of clothes, shoes, toys and the assorted detritus of a teenage girl's life rattled in boxes on the back seat and in the trunk.

"You okay, sweetie?"

Bev started at the question, raising her chin off her hand and glancing at her aunt. "I'm good. Thanks."

Her aunt struggled visibly for something to say, eyes flickering between the road and Beverly. "You can start school right away, if you want. I enrolled you in Hawkins High already. You'll make new friends in no time."

Bev had no answer to that. She thought about seven pairs of hands clasping tight, the sting of open wounds, twin scars on her palms. *New friends*. But who in Hawkins could ever replace the friends she already had?

Hawkins, Indiana

Jane stared at the images flickering high above her, but all she saw were colours, the distinct frames of the film lost in her unfocused eyes. Her thoughts, as always, were a thousand miles away from the little movie theatre, and she found herself again drowning in her worries. High school in seventeen days. The summer, slipping away from her too fast. Mike's hand gripping hers too tight.

"El? Sorry – Jane?"

Jane blinked. The screen came back into focus. Screaming teen punks

were being chased by shambling corpses. She grimaced and turned to see Mike watching her, illuminated from above by the screen.

“Yes?” she whispered back to him.

“Are you okay?” His own hushed tones were worried, brows drawn over eyes that looked black in the dim light.

Jane nodded in reply. In truth, she didn’t know if she was okay or not. This summer had been perhaps the closest to *okay* she’d ever felt – safe at last from Papa, from the monsters, from the Upside Down. A warm safe place to sleep, good food, smiles and laughter in the mornings. A name of her own, not a number. Her friends, the best things in her life, D&D every Sunday, the arcade every other night. Max was teaching her how to skateboard. Was this what *okay* was? She would ask Hop what *okay* meant, and then maybe she’d know if she was or not.

The film over, they spilled out into a soft orange sunset – Jane, Mike, Lucas and Max with an arm around each others’ shoulder, Dustin, and Will. As they walked, Mike’s hand slipped into hers, and she stiffened, heart pounding. She didn’t pull her hand away. Her fingers curled tentatively over his, but as he leaned closer, she leaned away. Their shoulders, close to brushing, suddenly had inches of daylight between them. Mike didn’t seem to notice.

Dustin and Will agreed to race each other to Dustin’s house, as usual. Max similarly dared Lucas to catch her on her skateboard, which he never could, and they both sped off, Max with her mane of red hair flying behind like fire in the fading sunlight. Mike and Jane were left alone.

“Want me to walk you home?” he asked. A shy smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. Jane’s eyes kept hyper-focusing on random details. His hair was getting too long, drifting in his eyes. One of his sneakers had a broken lace, tied together in a scruffy knot. His ears went red when he blushed.

He was looking at her too intensely. Even as the sun was going down, the air was too close. Jane dropped her eyes, trying to escape his gaze.

"No thanks. I can bike home." She swung her leg over the saddle and before Mike could say anything more, she was peddling away.

"You're late."

Jane checked the numbers on the digital clock. "8:16."

"We agreed 8:15." Hop was smiling a little. He was joking. Jane relaxed and smiled too. Sometimes it was difficult to tell if he was being serious or not, but he never deliberately deceived her.

Dinner was on the table. Roast chicken, fluffy mashed potatoes, buttery corn. It was getting better every night as Hop got better at making it, branching out from microwave meals to actual home cooking, from scratch. Someone was teaching him. Jane didn't know who, but she could guess.

It was nice, even if the potatoes were still a little watery, but Jane had to give up after a few bites. Though Mike was long gone, her stomach still felt tight.

"You okay, kiddo?"

She looked up from her plate into Hop's concerned eyes.

"Hopper...what does *okay* mean?"

"No-one told you yet?"

She shook her head. "Not really."

"Well...*okay* is like...average. Not really bad...but not really good either. Just getting along alright. Understand?"

Jane nodded. "Yes. Yes, I am...*okay*."

Hopper nodded back, but his eyes were a little narrowed with concern that Jane did not pick up on.

Portland, Maine

The car rattled as it pulled into the motel parking lot. Silently,

Beverly and her aunt got out. Her aunt went to pay, leaving Bev to pull her backpack that contained her toiletries, pyjamas and a change of clothes out of the car. They trudged together through the neon-lit courtyard, up the stairs and into the tiny two-bed room, too tired and too wary of each other to try and make any more conversation.

Bev closed the bathroom door with a snap. Pulled pyjamas over skinny, scarred limbs. The harsh glow of the strip-light highlighted every freckle and acne scar on her bare face and the dark shadows under her sleepless brown eyes. She brushed her teeth for a minute, spat, and turned the tap sharply. Water spluttered out. Bev stared at the plughole, strangely transfixed. The swirl of the water going down created a winking effect that brought up some memory, something itching at the edge of her subconscious. Something about bathrooms. Something about drains. She remembered, and then, she didn't. Like water going down the drain, her memories of Derry were already being washed away. It comforted her – no more nightmares. But the Losers were fading already, and she was so scared of being left alone with not even memories to comfort her.

In bed that night, she didn't sleep. She stared at the lights playing on the ceiling, projected through the gap in the cheap curtains, and tried to remember.

Their names; Bill, Ben, Mike, Eddie, Stan, Richie. Repeat them, like a mantra. Don't fall asleep. Bill stutters. Ben wrote you poetry. Mike's an orphan. Eddie has asthma. Stan loves birds. Richie has glasses. There was more to them, she knew, they were more than just one thing, but the harder she clung to them, the faster they slipped away, like grains of sand through her fingers. Frightened, she repeated their names, single characteristics. If she could just recall the most basic things about them, she wouldn't be alone.

She didn't want to be alone.

Hawkins, Indiana

More than a hundred miles away, Jane Hopper was also staring at the ceiling in sleepless agony.

Okay. I am okay.

If she said it enough times, did that make it true?

She didn't know why she wasn't okay. She really didn't. She had everything. She was safe, loved, cared for. She should be happy. Why wasn't she happy? Was something broken in her beyond repair?

The worst thought: maybe Kali was right. *They cannot save you, Jane.* She had saved them, saved all of them, the whole town, maybe even, as Joyce had said once, the whole world. But she was just a little girl even after all that, just turned fourteen, and who was going to save her? Did she even deserve to be saved?

It should be easy, normal life. She had fought monsters, human and otherworldly, and survived. She had closed a gate to another world with only her mind. Why, then, did the idea of going to school among her peers fill her with such dread? Why did the touch of her boyfriend's hand freeze her to the spot?

Maybe that's what it was supposed to feel like. Love. Jane didn't really know; another frustrating gap in her knowledge. He had waited for her for three hundred and fifty-three days. He called every night. That was love right? Right? It was the one thing she didn't feel comfortable talking to Hopper about; every time she mentioned Mike he would huff and roll his eyes. She knew he didn't really mean it...but she also knew she'd rather die than mention her doubts to Hop. To anyone, really, but especially him. If she didn't talk about her feelings, would they, maybe, just go away? Jane hoped so. She lay in the dark, and she hoped.

2. at the moment bound for nowhere

August 30th

Hawkins, Indiana

Her Aunt Meg's house was small and plain, but her room had a nice view, Beverly guessed. She dumped her backpack on the narrow bed. The last rays of sunlight streamed through the window that looked out onto the woods that reminded Bev of the Barrens. The room itself was decorated in a flowery, feminine style that Bev was not enthusiastic about, but she guessed she could pin her posters over the floral wallpaper and eventually, it might feel more like her. She flopped backwards on the bed and stared at the orange-streaked ceiling. She was here at last. Hawkins, Indiana. Her new home.

Yeah, right.

"Beverly! Take-out's here!"

When Bev came down, her aunt was laying containers of Chinese food on the kitchen table. The kitchen was small, but brightly lit and clean, kind of cozy, Bev guessed. At least the place wasn't as cramped as her old apartment.

"You like your room?"

"Yeah, it's...nice," Bev replied politely.

"You mind getting the cutlery? Just that draw, there."

Bev nodded and did as her aunt asked. They sat on opposite sides of the round kitchen table and ate in awkward silence as the sun crept lower through the lace-curtained windows.

"So. Three days 'till school, huh?"

"...Uh, yeah. I guess."

"If you don't want to start right away, we can wait until you're ready..."

“No, no.” Starting school weeks after everyone else? No way. Bev was used to being a social outcast, but that didn’t mean she enjoyed it. If at all possible, she didn’t want to spend all four years of high school with no friends. “I’m ready. Three days. Can’t wait.” *Overstatement.*

She can’t have said it enthusiastically enough, though, because Aunt Meg still frowned at her. “Well, if you’re sure, kid. I’ll drive you -”

“No,” Bev interrupted quickly. “I can bike.”

“If you like,” her aunt capitulated, not wanting to start an argument on Bev’s first night. “We’ll take a look around town in the meantime so you know where everything is, buy you some school supplies or whatever, maybe catch a movie. What do you say?”

“Sounds good.”

Meg glanced at the wall clock. “9:15. What time do you usually get to bed?”

Whenever I liked. Daddy was usually passed out by 10 and he didn’t take much notice whether I was in bed or not. But she didn’t say that. Instead, she shrugged. “I guess now.” There was nothing else to do but go to bed, anyway.

“Okay. Remember to brush your teeth.”

August 31st

“Remember to keep your balance. Keep your weight even – yeah, give it another push.”

Jane wobbled on the board and pushed with one foot to keep going as Max called out instructions. Warm sunlight, the last push of summer before the autumn chill arrived, beat down on the asphalt of the parking lot they were practising in.

“Move your hips to turn – like, shift your weight. Yeah, yeah, good...”

Jane moved in a wide, jerky circle around Max, giggling a little, giddy with success. She wished she was already as smooth and graceful on the board as her friend, but Max claimed she was doing

really well for a beginner. She made it look so *easy*, though. Max had, at first, suggested Jane use her powers to move the board, but she didn't like using them so casually. It felt wrong, somehow. When people needed her to use them, it was okay, she guessed, but when it was just to help her, or for *fun*...she couldn't adequately articulate her feelings about it, but she just *couldn't*.

Frowning with concentration, Jane jerked her hips again and the board swung round.

"Hey!"

Jane's head snapped round at the shouted greeting, taking the rest of her body, and the skateboard, with her. Her legs went out from under her instantly, and she fell on her back with no time even to call out.

"El! Are you okay?"

Jane sat up, head spinning. Her palms stung where she'd used them to break her fall, red and raw and gritty, but apart from that she felt fine.

"I'm fine." She took Max's offered hand, wincing where the salt of her skin wormed into the numerous little cuts on her palms.

"What the hell, Wheeler, nice going distracting her like that," Max said sarcastically, rolling her eyes. Mike looked suitably sheepish.

"Whoops. Sorry. Are you sure you're okay, El?"

What was with everyone asking her that all the time? Jane felt a sudden surge of irritation flare up; at Mike's constant attention trained on her, at his wide-eyed expression of concern, at his continued use of her old nickname when she'd *told* him, she wasn't Eleven any more, she was *Jane*, not a number, a person...

"I'm *fine*!" She shrugged his hand off her shoulder violently. Mike and Max both took a step back, expressions surprised and wary. Immediately, Jane began to panic. "I-I'm sorry, Mike. I didn't mean to..." She struggled, red-faced to find the words. Mike shook his head.

"It's cool. Really."

Jane nodded shakily as Max picked the skateboard up. "I guess that ends the lesson for today."

"I was just coming over to see if you guys were coming to the arcade," Mike explained, still stealing anxious glances at Jane.

"Sure. How about it, Jane?"

"Yeah, okay," Jane replied quietly.

The clamour of the arcade, the flashing lights, electronic beeps and screams of laughter and frustration were giving Jane a headache. Normally she loved the arcade, but today she felt...*weird*. Overwhelmed. She kept replaying her snap at Mike over and over again in her mind, and the vague sense of irritation still lingered. Why did he have to interrupt them? She was having *fun* until he arrived. And yet, she felt vaguely guilty. Shouldn't she be having more fun when he was around? Why couldn't she just be grateful for him, for how much he loved her, and be happy?

Jane and Max took turns playing Dig Dug, sharing the console happily. Another thing Max had taught her to do; the cheats and tricks she used to get such high scores, the skills she needed to beat the rest of the Party every time. Jane loved it; she'd never seen anything like the brightly moving screen in her life, and she loved the feeling of *belonging* she had with her friends all gathered behind her, encouraging her, yelling out help and groaning in sympathy when she failed, screaming with triumph when she won.

Mike came up behind her; she could see his face reflected in the loading screen. He grinned at her in the reflection and she smiled back. To her, her expression seemed a little sad, wistful in a way. Maybe it was the screen, warping it.

"You're gonna smash it," Mike grinned. "You're amazing at this." Jane jumped a little as he moved closer, chest nearly pressed to her back. She tried to concentrate on the game, on the rhythm of pressing the buttons and moving the joystick, getting the timing just right, but her hands were shaking and her character quickly died. Mike shook his head. "Never mind. Try again. I know you can beat Max's high-score."

“Fat chance, Wheeler,” Max laughed from somewhere behind her. Jane wished they’d all be quiet. They were distracting her.

The game started up again, but Jane was still shivering, her hands spasming on the joystick and missing the buttons. “It’s okay, just take it slow,” Mike murmured. He placed a hand on her hip – barely a touch, just the smallest pressure on the waistband of her jeans, but she jumped anyway. Onscreen, her character died again, and Jane snarled, the anger surging through her again.

“You distracted me!” she cried, brushing Mike aside. The room was spinning and blood rushed to her face, burning hot like a fever. Her head pounded. She had to get out; away from all the flashing lights and harsh sounds. “I – it’s too hot in here, I have to – I have to go,” she sighed, desperate just to get out, not thinking about the reactions of the others, not seeing Dustin, Lucas and Will exchanging worried glances or Mike’s open-mouthed look of distress. She practically ran outside, brushing hot tears off her face as she strode away into the gathering dusk.

Earlier That Day

Bev and her aunt grabbed lunch at one of Hawkins’ only eating establishments, a small diner just off Main Street, and set out in search of notebooks and pens, the usual weaponry of the battlefield known as high school. The best place for that kind of stuff, according to Aunt Meg, was Melvald’s General Store, just a small shop selling just about any bit of useless crap you could think of. They found the stationary at the back and Bev picked out what she needed, not feeling particularly fussy. They brought them to the counter and Bev loitered idly, reading the covers of the magazines as Aunt Meg chatted with the store clerk.

“Oh Meg, you’re back! How was Maine?”

“Rainy. Just like I remember it.”

“Lucky you. It’s been dry as bone here since May...who’s this?” Bev looked up. The store clerk, a dark-haired woman around her aunt’s age with smile-lines around her eyes, was smiling at her.

"My niece, Beverly. She's come to live with me. Bev, this is Joyce Byers."

Bev mustered a smile. "Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too, Beverly. Getting ready for school?"

"Uh-huh."

"Bev's starting at high school."

"Right! So's Will!" Joyce addressed Beverly again. "My son, Will, is your age. It's a pretty small school, so you'll probably run into each other at some point. I'll tell him to say hi!"

Bev cringed. Nothing worse than your mom telling you to look out for the new kid. Poor Will Byers.

"How is Will?" Aunt Meg asked.

"Oh, good, doing great," Joyce replied. Bev thought she detected a slight change in her tone of voice.

"And Jonathan?"

"Last year of high school. It's crazy, it's like five minutes ago he was a toddler – you'll see, when Bev leaves for college..." Bev tuned out of the conversation again.

Walking home, Bev kicked at stones on the side-walk, sending them spinning into the road. Her aunt was still a silent companion, and Bev wondered if they would ever be comfortable with each other, or whether she would endure these awkward silences until she graduated and left for...college? Maybe. The sun was going down once more, bathing Hawkins in a soft pink-golden glow. Like this, the town looked kind of pretty, the light softening the harsh edges, any dilapidation or disrepair lost in shadows. Bev knew Derry had never looked as nice as this place. The thought was some comfort. Whatever happened on Monday, it could never get as bad as Derry.

Her attention was caught by a shadow moving over the road ahead of them, fast as quicksilver. Her first panicked, instinctual thought was,

It's back. It followed me. She shook the thought away, however, as she picked up on the fact it was a girl on a bicycle, the fading light flashing on the mud-guards. She sped past Bev and Aunt Meg, going the opposite way, and Bev caught a glimpse of shoulder-length dark hair flying, legs pumping furiously, and a face twisted with anger and shining with tears. Then the girl was gone, flying into the darkness beyond. Bev paused and turned to watch her go.

“Bev? Let’s go, kid.”

Beverly turned and followed her aunt home.

3. don't you think you're falling?

Monday, September 2nd

Bev examined her reflection in the full-length mirror, spotted with age and cracked in one corner. It was dumb, but she felt a little stronger wearing this outfit. Her cut-off overalls and wine-red top, the belt tied at her waist, and her old boots...somehow they made her feel safe. Like armour.

You were wearing this the last day you were with the others.

She frowned at herself in the mirror.

Yeah. I was. The memory of a field filled with wild-flowers and the pressure of two hands clasped in hers swum to the surface of her mind for the briefest of seconds and then sank again. Beverly shook her head as if to dislodge the ache of melancholy that rose in her.

The morning air was still slightly balmy, not yet sharp with the crisp chill of autumn, and Bev leaned her head back and enjoyed the feeling of the breeze ruffling her curls as she biked to school. Her hair had been getting a little longer, but she'd cut it again in the bathroom last night, so the air was cool on the bare skin of her neck and around her ears.

Wherever you go, small-town high schools are pretty much identical, Bev observed as she padlocked her bike to a rail in the parking lot of Hawkins High. The low, blunt square buildings, groups of girls gossiping and blowing gum on every corner, guys yelling and showing off, playing ball. You could practically smell the raging hormones, under the fog of sickly-sweet body-spray and musky deodorant. Bev grimaced.

The new girl couldn't just dump her stuff in her locker and go smoke in the toilets. Beverly had to find the main office and get her locker combination, ID, and all that crap. The office lady looked her up and down, taking in the short hair, scabbed knees and scuffed boots, and made a small noise of disapproval in the back of her throat, but she handed Bev her class schedule without a word and sent her on her

way.

Her locker was right in the place she didn't want it – apparently right next to that of the freshman queen-bee and her hive of bitchy followers. Bev took in the small crowd gathered near her locker, breathing in the scent of hairspray and cheap perfume. The girl who owned the locker in question was clearly the leader; they all hovered around her, giggling shrilly whenever she made a nasty comment about a passer-by as she lounged against her neighbour's – Bev's – locker, with her own left wide open, blocking Bev's access. She took a deep breath, squared her shoulders, clenched her fists, and went over there.

"Excuse me."

The girl looked up. Bev's first thought was – *Gretta*. The two girls might have been spiritual twins – this girl was slimmer and taller, with fairer hair, but they shared that look of spiteful entitlement that came with being the high school alpha bitch; wealthy (by small-town standards), beautiful, and cruel as only a teenage girl could be.

"Do I know you?" Over-mascaraed eye-lashes flicked up and down as the girl took Beverly in.

"You're blocking my locker," Bev replied coldly. *Just move. Don't start something. This could be easy.* But of course, it could never be easy. This girl had identified Bev as a threat to her dominance as soon as she set eyes on her, and now, in front of all her little groupies, she could not back down without losing her rep.

"Because you clearly don't know me," she replied as if she hadn't heard Bev at all. She crooked long, sparkly-pink fingernails in a little wave. "Hi. Gloria Duke."

"Please move. I just want to get into my locker." Bev tried to sound calm, polite. Not begging, not pleading. Just reasonable.

Gloria laughed a little, shiny pink lips curling into a sneer. "Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't realise I was in your way." She moved aside, lips smacking as she chewed her gum. Bev moved forward, and a denim-covered shoulder slammed into hers as a foot in a patent-leather

kitten heel stuck out to trip her. She fell, face burning, into the locker, ears filled with more giggles.

“Oops,” Gloria said sweetly as Bev turned around, still red-faced with humiliation, to face her. She blew a bubble and then popped it loudly. “I’m such a klutz,” she said in between chews. “You should be more careful around me – I’m sorry, didn’t catch your name?”

“Bev Marsh,” Beverly snarled. No need to get the *Beaverly* nickname started back up again, at least not on the first day.

“Okay. Watch out, *Bev*. People at this school can be so...*clumsy*.” Gloria took a step forward, blue, over-lined eyes narrowed. “You could take a nastier fall next time.”

“God, get back in *Carrie* or whatever horror movie you came from, Gloria,” said an exasperated voice from somewhere to Bev’s right. “She gets it, you’re a mean girl. Back off.”

“This is a private conversation, carpet-muncher.” Gloria turned her glare on the girl with the long red hair who stood at her locker a few doors down. “It’s none of your business.”

“You’re right, it’s not. But I’ve never been very good at minding my own business.” Now a few other people had stopped to watch the little scene – the red haired girl’s friends, in particular, seemed to have gathered to back her up. “And neither have the rest of us. So fuck off before we make you.”

Gloria’s lip curled again. She was really very pretty, but the way she twisted her face turned that beauty into something sour. “Oh, like your little nerd boyfriend and rest of the cast of the *Goonies* could *make* me do anything.” She scoffed at the boys who were glaring at her.

“If I have a boyfriend, I can’t very well be a carpet-muncher, can I, Gloria?” the girl pointed out. Gloria flushed an ugly, angry red.

“Whatever. Stay out of my way, Mayfield.” She shot Bev an ugly look and stalked off, head held high and the bow in her hair bobbing over the crowd of kids, her friends following her like ducklings behind

their mother.

"Thanks," Bev said shortly to the girl. "You didn't have to do that."

She shrugged. "If it wasn't you, it would have been us. Don't worry, she's mostly harmless. If she senses you could take her in an actual fight, she backs off, y'know? All bark and no bite."

"Uh-huh." Bev sized the other girl up warily. Her long red hair was tucked behind her ears, and she wore comfortable, practical clothes – t-shirt, jeans, an old hoodie. A skateboard was strapped to her backpack.

"Yeah, she's just annoying," the black kid agreed, wrapping an arm round her shoulder.

"Oh, yeah? You weren't just a little bit hurt when she called you a 'little nerd'? You're not gonna go home and cry tonight?" she teased him. He shoved her playfully.

"Shut up," he chuckled. They grinned at each other and seemed to forget for a second that Bev was still standing there. She glanced around awkwardly.

"Hi, I'm Dustin," filled in the other boy, smiling. "The other *Goonies* cast member."

Bev sniggered, despite still feeling awkward. "Nice to meet you."

"I'm Max, and this is my boyfriend, Lucas," Max supplied, joining back in the conversation.

"Beverly Marsh."

"We heard. You're new in town?" Lucas asked.

Bev sighed. "Sure am." *The new kid on the block. Now why does that make me smile?*

"Hang out with us, if you like," Max offered. "I won't tell you we're not a bunch of losers -"

“- Hey! -”

“- But it’s better than nothing, huh?”

Bev grinned. “I don’t mind hanging out with losers.” Somehow, she felt she might be able to trust these guys. They certainly *seemed* okay, at least.

“Then we’ll see you at lunch,” Max smiled back as the bell rang.

Okay. First friends made. We’ll probably drift apart by next week, but at least this week I’ll have someone to hang out with, Bev thought as she walked to her first class after homeroom.

She entered the classroom and tried to make a beeline for the seat furthest back, but was intercepted by the teacher, who dragged her up to the front of the class and forced her to introduce herself. She cringed, scuffing her toes on the floor and staring sullenly downwards as she mumbled her name and where she came from. When she looked up, she saw row on row of vacant stares looking back at her. Grateful to be released from the torture, she slipped to the back of the class and sat down.

In the next classroom over, Jane sat with her head down, fidgeting nervously with the single pendant necklace around her neck.

Just tell him you’re sorry. Just look over the aisle and whisper ‘I’m sorry, Mike.’ It’s not like it’s difficult.

She quickly glanced over the aisle at the desk next to her. Mike’s head was also down, as he watched himself turning his pen over and over in his fingers. When he sensed eyes on him, he looked up, but was disappointed to see Jane quickly look away from him again. He wanted to reach out to her, to at least ask her if she was alright, but every expression of concern just seemed to make her more upset lately. He really had no idea how to make it right between them again. Her freak-out at the arcade had been his fault, somehow, he knew that, but he couldn’t work out what he’d done wrong, and it scared him to hell. He’d thought it would all be so simple when he finally got her back. But it wasn’t. It *wasn’t*.

High school. It was all so overwhelming, and Jane longed to have the comfort of Mike's smile, but at the same time, she was afraid to reach out to him. What if she freaked out on him again? She couldn't navigate these huge echoing corridors and rooms full of strange people by herself. She *needed* Mike; but at the same time, she felt like she needed to keep away from him, too.

Jane felt like everyone was staring at her. All the time, she felt eyes on her, and although she knew no-one knew about her powers she still felt so transparent, like they could all see right through her and see that she was *different, not normal, freakish, weirdo*. Thinking about *those* new words made her stomach swirl and her palms sweat. *They know. They all know, that you're a weirdo, a freak. A monster.* She swallowed thickly and stared at the blank page of her notebook as the teacher talked, and tried, sporadically, to take notes as Hopper had told her she would need to do, but she could barely concentrate.

Beverly's next class was a repeat of the first humiliation, but she gritted her teeth and tried to smile as she introduced herself to her peers. They all stared at her again, some vaguely hostile, some uninterested, but one boy gave her a shy, friendly smile from beneath his straight brown fringe. Bev instinctively smiled back, but warily, still gun-shy after her encounter with Gloria. She chose the empty seat next to his, though, as it was the furthest back available. He smiled at her again. He *seemed* normal, at least.

"Hi, I'm Will," he whispered as she sat down. "My mom told me you were new here. Welcome to Hawkins." His cheeks were a little red with embarrassment at doing as his mother told him, but he also seemed to genuinely want to welcome her.

"Thanks," she whispered back, as the teacher glared and shushed at them. Will grinned and turned back to his notes.

When the bell rang at last, Bev wasn't sure if she should wait for Will or not. He hung back to talk to the teacher, and Bev figured since they'd just met it was too early to start hanging around for him yet – and besides, she wanted some alone time. Now seemed like the best moment to start her favourite school activity, so she used her map to find an apparently deserted girls bathroom in the west wing of the main building. She locked herself in the far stall and drew out her

pack of cigarettes, patting down her pockets for her lighter; the glow of the flame brought her peace.

People here seemed, by and large, nice enough. But nice enough *wasn't* enough. She felt an ache in her chest, like something vital was missing, but she could hardly remember what. Six faces swam before her eyes, but they were smudged, like faded photographs. Her vision turned wet and blurry with unshed tears. She felt dampness on her cheeks and stubbed out her cigarette on the heavily graffitied wall viciously, rubbing her eyes and cheeks with both hands to get rid of the tears. “*Fuck*,” she muttered to herself.

The door to the bathroom slammed open and Bev jumped. Footsteps made their way to the stall next to Bev and slammed the door shut, locking it. Bev could hear the faint, rough sound of sobbing. Whoever she was, she sounded pretty fucking upset, and Bev’s sympathy was aroused despite her own misery.

“Um...hello?”

The sobs stopped in a choked sound of surprise. “H...Hello?”

“Are you okay in there?”

“I...I don’t know.”

“...Can I...help?”

“I don’t know.” The sobbing started again. “I don’t think anyone can...”

“Well, whatever it is...it might be better if you talked about it. Right?”

The crying quieted again, slowly. “I don’t know how to explain.”

“That’s fine. Me neither,” Bev smiled weakly. How the *fuck* do you explain that you can’t remember your best friends?

“I just thought everything would be easier, I guess.”

“Everything? You mean like, high school?”

“Yeah. And other stuff. Sometimes I feel like my life before was easier...even though it was bad. Really, really bad.”

“I hear that. Even bad times can have some good to them.” *A memory resurfaces, briefly. Richie – she thinks it’s Richie – is trying to play some band dude’s tuba in the middle of a sunny street. Surprised, she snorts with laughter.*

“What’s funny?”

“Huh? Oh, nothing. Just a memory.” *Gone, like ripples in water fading away.* “You’re gonna be okay, you know. High school ends. People have got through it before you, and you’ll do it too.” She was half saying it to the other girl, and half to herself.

“Thank you,” the girl whispered.

“Well, you’re welcome...whoever you are.”

“I’m Jane.”

“Nice to meet you, Jane. I’m Beverly.”